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# SUMMIT MOODS: IMPRESSIONS OF PAST US-SOVIET SUMMITS, 1959-75

## Summary

Despite the tight restrictions still generally maintained on the official record of US-Soviet summits, much of the substance has long since seeped into the public domain and need not be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that the Brezhnev summits were those where SALT I, ABM, and other related arms limitation documents, as well as more than a dozen other bilateral agreements, were signed. What has been less explicitly detailed is the precise Soviet mind-set in these discussions, as well as the attitudes of the Soviet leaders on troubling issues which arose. This paper, based on the official record, focuses on the latter aspects, with the caveat that the reader bear in mind the larger backdrop of summit activities against which these discussions took place.

The Khrushchev summits marked the USSR's emergence as a superpower; Brezhnev's hallmark stands out in the later summit records.

--For Brezhnev, and his colleagues, nothing matches a summit with the US President for registering superpower status. The entire world can see by the very fact of a meeting that the US acknowledges the USSR as an equal; so success at a summit is at a premium.

--Nuts-and-bolts negotiations to Brezhnev are not the main purpose of summits; rather, the leaders should devote themselves to setting new and far-sighted courses which will have an impact on the world. Thus, Brezhnev constantly is in pursuit of "principles"--basic principles of relations, principles to avoid nuclear war, principles on arms control.

--In Brezhnev's view, disarmament and detente are the priority issues before the world's leaders, and though at times he has professed to be, and probably

was, inadequately prepared for substantive negotiations, he has also shown himself capable not only of mastering detail but of the tough kind of decision-making that will secure his objectives and carry along his colleagues.

--China has been ever-present at these summits, not as a formal agenda topic but as a worrisome matter which all Soviet leaders have felt compelled to discuss with American presidents; Brezhnev did so at some length and in "confidence" with President Nixon.

--Brezhnev has shared the summit limelight, and burdens, mainly with Kosygin when the meetings have taken place in Moscow, and Kosygin has also often performed the role of mediator in times of international crisis (the Middle East in 1967, Vietnam then and in 1972.)

--The frankness that marked particularly the 1972 meeting (staged in the face of an escalation of the Vietnam war) is what the Soviets profess to seek-- putting all differences on the table. But in fact they assume certain rules are operative such as agreement to disagree on ideological insolubles.

--Brezhnev seems to enjoy the pomp and circumstance of these occasions, though he claims to abhor protocol and strives for an air of informality through exchanges of pleasantries, reminiscences, humor and the like. He is, however, sensitive to any personal slight, and is also careful, even when outspoken, to show due personal regard for his summit partner.

--In particular, Brezhnev expects to be taken at his word and is aware he is speaking as a world leader, not a private person. Acceptance of the integrity of his role is important to him, and he often has made the point that when he gives his word he keeps it.

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Summit Highlights, 1959-75*

The Khrushchev Summits: Emergence of a Superpower. The Khrushchev summits reflected the Soviet mood of that era: a loud and contentious assertion of Soviet power and equal rights gained from victory in the war; but also a growing awareness that a modus vivendi with the US was necessary if the cold war were to be contained.

Coming after nearly 15 years of strained relations, the 1959 Camp David summit was ostensibly intended to diminish cold-war tensions. As the first visit of a Soviet leader to the US, Khrushchev's reception was mixed but probably more friendly than he had anticipated. It did not, however, moderate his aggressive approach on the issue uppermost in his mind: Soviet insistence on a resolution of the Berlin question even if it meant signing a separate peace treaty with East Germany irrespective of Western occupation rights. Eisenhower's refusal to negotiate under duress and Khrushchev's arbitrariness precluded any agreement other than a statement of principles on how to proceed. Khrushchev took special umbrage at even the slightest hint of Soviet inequality with the US and charged attempts were being made to intimidate him with US power.

In the 1961 Vienna summit, Khrushchev staked out an even more defiant position on Germany and Berlin, and in effect challenged the new US President to a test of wills. President Kennedy described the encounter as somber but useful in that it exposed the wide areas of difference in policy and outlook of the two countries and leaders. Far from improving relations, however, the meeting turned out to be a psychological dress-rehearsal for the confrontation over Cuba the following year.

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*The meetings were: Eisenhower-Khrushchev, Camp David, September 25-27, 1959.
Kennedy-Khrushchev, Vienna, June 3-4, 1961.
Johnson-Kosygin, Glassboro, June 23-25, 1967.
Nixon-Brezhnev, Moscow, May 23-31, 1972.
Nixon-Brezhnev, Washington and San Clemente, June 24-27, 1973.
Nixon-Brezhnev, Moscow, June 27-July 3, 1974.
Ford-Brezhnev, Vladivostok, November 23-24, 1974.
Ford-Brezhnev, Helsinki, July 30-August 2, 1975.

(Multilateral summits before 1959 are not treated here; the 1962 Paris summit was called off over the U-2 incident.)

The Kosygin-Johnson Summit: Attempts at Mediation. The elaborate preparations characteristic of earlier summits were missing in the hastily arranged 1967 meeting, coming as it did in the midst of the Middle East crisis of that summer which had brought Kosygin to the UN special session on the conflict. Both leaders appeared satisfied that the uninhibited give-and-take of their meeting had enabled them to step back from confrontation, and Kosygin seemed especially gratified that he could play the role of mediator on the Middle East, and Vietnam as well; he told the President they had accomplished more in three hours than others could in three years.

Brezhnev and President Nixon: A New Era in Relations. If these initial summits has been in the shadows of the cold war, those of the early 1970's marked the definite emergence of US-Soviet relations into the warmer climate of detente. Brezhnev termed the 1972 and 1973 meetings epoch-making, witnessing as they did a break with the antagonisms of the postwar era and the beginnings of a new approach based on an acceptance of continuing differences. The very fact that US policy was now being formulated by a President who long had been major opponent of rapprochement with the Soviets seemed to make the break more credible to the Soviets.

The public accounts of the 1972 Moscow summit, and the agreements reached there do not fully convey the agonizing reappraisal that evidently preceded the Soviet decision to make this major policy shift. It should be recalled that the meeting took place against a background of Soviet apprehensiveness concerning the US rapprochement with China, initiated by President Nixon's visit there just three months earlier. Seemingly genuine fears that a US-PRC alliance was in the making were clearly an important consideration in the Soviet leadership's changed attitude toward the US.

In returning the 1972 visit, Brezhnev's 1973 trip to the US was meant to be a personal tour de force as well as a display of superpower collaboration in the interests of peace. The public portions, however, seemed to show that the best a Soviet leader could command from the American audience was an air of restrained curiosity--Brezhnev did far better in his exchanges with US businessmen and Congressmen. Public apathy did not dampen the mood in the summit meetings themselves. In any event, the variety and number of agreements signed attested to the prevailing goodwill.

At the third Brezhnev-Nixon summit in Moscow in 1974, both sides acknowledged lowered expectations but there was a mutual dogged determination to emerge with something, no matter how secondary, to justify the meeting and stem growing criticism--perhaps on both sides--of detente. If the Soviets had any misgivings about US domestic developments and the consequent political restraints on the President, they gave no sign of it. Both sides professed disappointment that they had been unable at that meeting to carry the SALT negotiations to a successful conclusion. The Soviets seemed especially anxious that, because more time was needed on SALT, nothing in the public statements should "cast aspersions" on the existing agreement, and Brezhnev's worry about what would happen after the expiration of the interim agreement in 1977 suggested particular anxiety on that score.

The Brezhnev-Ford Summits: Change and Continuity. Soviet policy toward the US undoubtedly underwent a major reassessment after the resignation of President Nixon, but Moscow's proclaimed view was that detente would endure regardless of changes in leadership. At the 1974 Vladivostok mini-summit, Brezhnev expressed his happiness that President Ford intended to carry on the course that his predecessor has started. The air of good feeling did not conceal a certain apprehensiveness, however. Brezhnev was sober and businesslike in the substantive negotiations and tough-minded in making decisions. The Soviets appeared satisfied with the understanding reached on SALT II, the main subject of discussion, and gave the impression they believed enough momentum had been generated to move the negotiations forward.

Brezhnev apparently did not particularly relish the meeting with President Ford in Helsinki in mid-1975. Although he told the President "confidentially" that the Soviet leadership was supporting his election, and seconded the President's sentiments in favor of continuing detente, he nevertheless, professed to be unprepared to discuss SALT and was contentious on some of the details that were brought up. He did make a point that Soviet SALT objectives remained the same and that "Vladivostok determines those objectives." But he appeared anxious that nothing in the public statements be specific on SALT questions and not overly perturbed that no progress would be registered on the issue at this meeting.

## Issues Affecting Summit Moods

A number of recurrent issues have had a definite bearing on the mood and outcome of the various summits. The following are cited not to address the substance of the issues, but to indicate the Soviets' underlying concerns.

Arms Control and Disarmament. This subject has become the Kremlin's main justification for holding summits with the US. The Soviets have made a point of bringing forth disarmament "initiatives" and pressing for a US response. This has also given them an opening to complain about US arms policies and to discount fears of a "Soviet threat." The question of linkage of disarmament to other issues has always been present. Khrushchev in 1959 said if there was no agreement on Berlin, there was no possibility of agreement on bigger questions of disarmament (but then reversed himself to say that Berlin was not the primary question and should be second after disarmament). Kosygin told President Johnson he failed to see any true possibilities for disarmament while the Vietnam war continued and the Middle East was unsettled; and Brezhnev, while according disarmament priority, also repeatedly pointed to these two issues as obstacles.

Despite such linkages, the Soviet approach has been to strive for agreements on "principles," which in turn can be translated into specific agreements, a procedure Brezhnev especially has favored.

--At the 1972 meeting the "Basic Principles of Relations" pledged the two sides inter alia to do their utmost to avoid military confrontations and to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war; and the AMB Treaty and Interim SALT Agreement were based on principles deriving in turn from the Nonproliferation Treaty.

--At the same summit, Brezhnev proposed an agreement on the non-use of nuclear arms, which was formalized in the 1973 summit in the "Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement."

--The 1973 summit witnessed signature of the "Basic Principles" of future SALT negotiations, and the 1974 meeting incorporated further principles on cessation of the arms race in the treaty on Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapons Tests and the statement on the dangers of environmental warfare.

--The Vladivostok accord of 1974 reached agreement in principle, as well as specifics, for carrying out further SALT II negotiations.

--And the codification of principles on European security at the 1975 Helsinki CSCE, while not to be evaluated primarily in the US-Soviet context, was considered by Moscow a further important achievement of the era, for which Brezhnev solicited US support.

Vietnam. Vietnam was a pivotal issue in the 1967 summit where Kosygin gave that meeting a uniquely personal flavor by urging the President to heed his advice and get together with Hanoi directly. At the 1972 summit Brezhnev, seconded by Kosygin, offered assistance in the form of some "constructive proposals" to be passed to the Vietnamese to get negotiations under way. Before doing so, however, he let the President know in no uncertain terms how bitter the Soviets were about the whole affair--about having to deal with an "aggressor" who even at that moment was bombing their ally, and inflicting casualties and damaging Soviet ships as well. He repeatedly described how difficult it had been for the Soviets to hold the summit with the US when Vietnam had left such a "deep imprint on the soul of the Soviet people" and, though he did not say it, apparently caused intense internal debate in the leadership (which may have contributed to the ouster of Politburo member Shelest). As Brezhnev explained it, "Without canceling our sharply critical attitude toward several points in American policy, we see nonetheless the possibility of exerting fruitful influence on the entire international situation--the road leading to settlement of several complex problems...including also Vietnam."

China. The Soviets tend to show a compulsive need to unburden themselves to US Presidents about China. Kosygin at the 1972 summit claimed the Chinese had been very anxious to go into Vietnam and fight the US, and while Vietnam had allegedly turned aside China's request, "there may come a critical moment for the Vietnamese when they will not refuse." When he was told that "that threat doesn't frighten us a bit," Kosygin said this was a question of a major war--an analysis of what might happen, and "that is more serious than a threat." And Brezhnev said "in confidence" that "we know quite for sure of late that Vietnam has been visited by delegation after delegation from China." Brezhnev also said that the communique on this summit could not, as the US had done with China during the February 1972 Nixon visit, merely say the two sides set forth their views on Vietnam, "because China, unlike the USSR, doesn't have a principled foreign policy of its own but wants to set various countries at loggerheads." (At the 1959 and 1961 summits Khrushchev had pleaded the Chinese Communist cause and urged a change in US policy, while in 1967 Kosygin was telling President Johnson about the "hullabaloo" the Chinese has raised about his trip to the US and how they had charged he was about to sell out to someone.)

It was in the context of nuclear arms that Brezhnev revealed his deepest concerns about China, concerns which he had labeled as "confidential and personal" but which the entire Soviet leadership has long been known to harbor in general outline if not specifics. For example, at the end of the 1972 summit Brezhnev noted that an important document on strategic arms limitation has been signed at the meeting but that France, the UK, and Peiping had not signed. "Therefore, we must closely follow their development to prevent any unfavorable developments." And he said of Peiping: "We really are not clear about what its policies and intentions are. This places on us an obligation to follow these policies and consult with each other."

At the 1973 meeting the Soviets had China very much in mind in signing the Nuclear War Prevention Agreement. Gromyko indicated as much when he asked Secretary Kissinger what he thought the Chinese reaction would be. When the Secretary responded that he expected the Chinese would not like Article IV (on consultations when a conflict from a third party threatens), Gromyko said the Chinese were probably "sitting there contemplating their next move."

At the session in San Clemente, Brezhnev noted that the US would soon have state-to-state relations with China and said: "I would like to ask if after some time we could exchange views about Chinese reaction to our rapprochement and to the treaty on prevention of nuclear war. This comparing of notes, this exchange of views, can only do us good." When told Dr. Kissinger would talk to Dobrynin, he said, "I will write you /the President/ my views directly. Do I understand that your reply is positive?"

When told the US would not do anything with China or Japan against the interest of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev said: "This is important, thank you. ... I am, however, sure of one thing. China will never stop the development of its nuclear arsenal, no matter what you say. We should continue to exchange on this subject. ... We cannot limit our arms while they build up."

In response to a question how long it would be until China became a nuclear power, Brezhnev said:

> "I believe that in the course of the next 15 years they will not reach a stage we will have then; but in 10 years they will have weapons equal to what we

> now have. We have tactical weapons sufficient to deal with them. But we must bring home to them that this cannot go on. We will adhere strictly to our agreements. But the Chinese will act in their fashion. In 1962 during our Party Congress, I remember how Mao said, "Let 400 million Chinese die, 300 million will be left." Such is the psychology of this man. Afterwards the people of the world became afraid, and a new phase started of the arms race. Then when Mao saw this idea was not gaining support, he made a somersault, asking us to sign the principles of coexistence with him. I don't believe them. They won't sign any agreements. These people are ruthless."

And as if to make the point stick, he repeated:

> "The Chinese have implemented agreements with others only rarely; even when they implemented them they interpreted them in ways that deprive them of meaning ... Often the Chinese hide things from the rest of the world. They managed to hide the death of an Emperor for a whole year. They are not honorable."

Brezhnev then showed the President a copy of a Soviet-proposed nonaggression treaty with China. "I am doing this as a rebuff to the slander of the Chinese. They claim we are amassing an army to threaten them. If the Chinese do not accept it, we will publish the text with appropriate commentary."

Toward the end of his discourse, Brezhnev brought up the possibility of US-PRC military collaboration by saying: "The peoples of the world will lose trust in us if an agreement of a military nature is concluded with China. I would like you to understand me." When he was told the US had never had military discussions with China, he said: "Of course, I believe you. In 1972 we did not raise the issue. But I am worried about the future. We do not intend to attack China but it will be different if China has a military agreement with the United States. That would confuse the issue."

Middle East. The Middle East has been a perennial sore spot in these discussions, with the Soviets, summit after summit, calling for total Israeli withdrawals and

warning that a settlement could come only with US-Soviet participation. In pleading the Arab cause to President Johnson in 1967, Kosygin warned that a new war would break out if the two powers did not get together to prevent it. In 1972 Brezhnev described the situation as "explosive" and called for a common approach with the US to "even now formalize some kind of understanding." He expanded that idea during his 1973 visit to the US to call for an agreement on principles. "If there is no clarity about the principles, we will have difficulty keeping the military situation from flaring up. Everything depends on troop withdrawals and adequate guarantees." He started out asking, on a "gentleman's basis," for "two or three principles," saying it was not necessary that they be in written form. When this was rejected as oversimplifying the problem, he persisted: there did not have to be two or three; one principle -- withdrawal of forces -- would do. "Do not let me leave without this assurance." He then said without this principle there was nothing he could do. "We need a friendly agreement. Or I will leave empty-handed. We should have an agreement without divulging it to the Arabs."

In June 1974, Brezhnev still called the region explosive but noted "honest differences" between the US and USSR. But at Vladivostok he was more sombre, noting that he had earlier warned of the danger of another war but that his warning had not been sufficiently taken into account. "Dr. Kissinger apparently thought he could do it himself. If we act together, ... we can find a fair solution -- if we don't, there will be war. We do not have the same appreciation of the problem and our approaches to it differ. The situation is poisoning the atmosphere."

Trade. Summit forums have given the Soviets a chance to air their perennial complaints on trade. A conversation between Khrushchev and the Under Secretary of State at the 1959 summit indicates how little movement there has been on subject. Khrushchev called trade more a political than an economic question, said it was the litmus paper of peaceful relations, and called the US attempt to impose conditions "high-handed" and "destined to fail." He emphasized the Soviet right to trade and seemed unresponsive to explanations about the role of Congressional and US public opinion on this score, taking note, however, of the US statement that there was a chance of liberalization perhaps in the next Congress.

In 1972, with the lend-lease debt linked with trade normalization, Kosygin attempted to discount the former as

much as possible by bargaining on the figures ("Mr. President, don't take us by the throat"), by appealing to the US to take account of the Soviet human and material losses in the war, and by whimsically saying that "this debt might continue on the US books for some ten years but eventually be written off like the Czarist debt." He held out prospects of "billions of rubles" of contracts in the development of Siberian gas reserves, claiming this would stimulate US business and lower American unemployment. Brezhnev in turn called for long-range decisions -- 3 to 4 billion dollars in credits, 25-year repayment terms, etc. On MFN, Kosygin professed difficulty in accepting the Congressional role ("maybe some situation in the US will change and it will not be Congress but someone else that decides these matters") and also squaring the economic agreements signed at the summit with lack of MFN. That summit, nevertheless, laid the basis for the long-term trade agreement concluded in 1972.

In 1973 Brezhnev claimed some satisfaction for what had developed in the preceding year (from 200 to 600 million rubles, etc.) and said the Soviets could offer one trillion cubic meters of gas to the US -- if the US wanted 20 to 25 billion cubic meters a year it would last 40 years. He discussed his "very pleasant" talks with senators on the subject and said he was well aware of the importance of Congress. At the 1974 and 1975 summits the Soviets were given assurances the executive branch would work for MFN.

Cuba. Cuba receded as a summit issue in the later meetings, but was at the fore of the Kennedy-Khrushchev 1961 discussions. In 1967 President Johnson asked Kosygin to use his influence to curb Havana's revolutionary pretensions in Latin America, which Kosygin may well have done during his stopover in Havana en route home from that summit. At the 1972 meeting Brezhnev volunteered: "We abide strictly by our understanding [on Cuba]. Even when there are submarine visits, we will strictly abide by our understanding." In 1975, following the Vladivostok summit, the Soviets in meetings between Brezhnev and Secretary Kissinger, turned aside warnings of the negative impact Soviet-Cuban actions in Africa would have on detente and US-Soviet relations.

Other Issues. Ideology was at the core of the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting where Khrushchev predicted the triumph of communism in new and less developed countries and pledged Soviet support toward this end, while Kennedy declared the

two had "wholly different views of right and wrong, of what is an internal affair and what is aggression." Signature of the "Basic Principles" at the 1972 summit, which posited the thesis that "differences in ideology and in the social systems of the USSR and the USA are not obstacles to the bilateral development of normal relations," rendered summit exchanges on ideological matters less bitter than theretofore. As Brezhnev at Vladivostok expressed it: "We have a number of differences, for example, as regards ideology. But Mr. Nixon and I agreed at the outset on one thing--not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. We like our system and you like yours. We hold this principle of noninterference sacred."

Although the label has been different, human rights have a long history tied in with summits. At the 1959 meeting the US side told Gromyko of petitions that had been received by the American Jewish organizations about the status of Jews in the USSR and expressed the hope that Khrushchev would meet with representatives of these groups while he was in the US. Gromyko rejected the overture as an internal Soviet matter. Petitions and overtures of this nature have accompanied other summits; the Soviets have invariably turned them away as interference in internal affairs, but have also used the occasion of summits to make gestures of their own to demonstrate humanitarian concerns.

In 1973 Brezhnev attempted personally to deal with the Jewish emigration issue ("this so-called question of departure of people from the Soviet Union") by giving out some statistics to congressmen he met. Congressional discussion of amending the 1974 Trade Act and the Kissinger-Jackson exchange of letters on Soviet emigration injected a sour note at Vladivostok. And by August 1975 Brezhnev's patience seemed exhausted. He told President Ford that since 1945, 98.4 percent of all requests for Jews to emigrate had been granted (some had been denied for security reasons), and that there was now a falling off which probably would continue. When the President said the figures given would disappoint some, Brezhnev replied: "What are we to do? Start talking people into leaving? ... I know virtually dozens of people of Jewish origin. Am I to go to Dymshits (Deputy Prime Minister) and say, "You've got to leave.' And Leibman of the Moscow Soviet -- should I grab him by the hand and tell him to go?"

Brezhnev's Personal Style. Through the five meetings of the 1970's certain idiosyncrasies emerge which mark Brezhnev's summit style.

--His concept of leadership is to set out broad courses of action for others to follow and not to get bogged down with details. (In test-ban discussions he suggested that all "second rate matters" be cast aside in favor of a general statement.)

--He has a certain contempt for bureaucrats including the military. ("Experts always think up 200 problems." And the "military decide what to shoot at, while the political leadership decides whether or not to shoot.")

--He is given to personal reminiscences to show himself as humane and "of the people." (He has described his emotional reactions to this day when visiting memorials for the war dead.)

--He attempts to achieve an air of informality by indulging in whimsy. ("I feel when people can joke with each other they are in a good mood and can do business with each other; a man who can't joke is not a good man." One of his favorite targets is his own -- and in Secretary Kissinger's day the US -- foreign secretary: "Gromyko is very unreliable; he softens up too easily." Or to Kissinger: "We fixed up the house /at Zavidova_/ especially for you. It has six missiles under it.")

--He seldom allows himself outbursts of temper but has shown unconcealed irritation when the US side has made statements showing knowledge of Soviet arms gained through intelligence (for example, to Kissinger in 1974 on the number of Soviet submarines and to President Ford in 1975 when there was a dispute over discussion of intelligence on the Backfire bomber -- ("We sit here and we don't believe each other; perhaps not we, but our intelligence people, should sit here.") And he is quite capable of asperity in the face of what he would view as an embarrassing US official statement timed to the summit. (He called President Ford's attention in 1975 to a statement by the US Defense Secretary on "the possibility or even the

probability of the US using nuclear weapons" against the Soviet Union. -- "What if we began replaying in kind. All our agreements would go to hell.")

--But above all, he wants to register the point that he is a serious and responsible world leader whose integrity is beyond question. ("If I say something I always keep my word. I can argue and debate but once I give my word I stand by it.")